



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

absolute worth. He will not admit that man was made for his conscience, but that conscience was made for man. Conscience is a means to an end, not an end in itself; it receives its value from what it accomplishes; it has relative and not absolute value. The moral law is not the highest good, but a means of realizing the highest good. In a certain sense, of course, it is a partial end in itself. Conscience is a human function, and if the development of the human soul is the highest good, then conscience as a part of that soul is a partial good, just as the human eye as a part of the human body, constitutes a part of the purpose realized by the human body (preservation, for example), and is thus a partial end in itself.

FRANK THILLY.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI.

THE OPTIMISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF IDEALISM.

MODERN idealists, both pluralists and monists, much as on first thought they would doubt it, in the last analysis construe optimism in terms of hedonism. Though indeed they both admit it is impossible to attach moral predicates to pleasure and pain as such, yet in one way or in another all idealists recommend virtue through happiness. Despite the fact that this view contains an uncritical yielding to a very human and universal prejudice, it has, nevertheless, plausible empirical justification.

I.

Free and strenuous moral endeavor demands, seemingly, that life shall have somehow an optimistic basis—shall be affirmed as worth while, on grounds psychological or moral,*

*Psychological optimism is either the evaluation of life strictly in terms of egotistic hedonism, or the willing acceptance of life as it comes in the belief "that the goal of moral progress is the complete coincidence of goodness with happiness."

real or assumed.* Instinctively loving life as we do, we prize it naturally in the first instance for the pleasurable experiences it contains. Along with each moment of consciousness goes a universal quality, namely, some degree of pleasure or pain. Empirically viewed the moments of pleasure are intrinsically desirable. If man's conscious existence contain an appreciable balance of pleasure over pain, life is good; if contrariwise, life is evil and without justification. This conclusion is inevitable, if man is merely a creature of sentiency.

So far, however, we are at the point of view only of sentiency, and of good as "psychological good." It may be that we cannot thus conclude regarding "moral good." Yet here again the positive affirming of life as worth while demands an optimistic basis construed, as before, it appears on first view, in terms of happiness (pleasurable content of consciousness). Relevantly to this matter, although in a different context, no one has written so well as Professor William James. He says: "Probably no one can make sacrifices for 'right' without to some degree personifying the principle of right for which the sacrifice is made and expecting thanks for it. *Complete* social unselfishness, in other words, can hardly exist; *complete* social suicide hardly occur to a man's mind. Even such texts as Job's, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him,' or Marcus Aurelius', 'If the gods hate me and my children, there is reason for it,' can least of all be cited to prove the contrary. For beyond all doubt Job revelled in the thought of Jehovah's recognition of the worship after the slaying should have been done; and the Roman Emperor felt sure that the Absolute Reason would not be all indifferent to his acquiescence in the gods' dislike. The old test of piety, 'Are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?' was probably never answered in the affirmative except by those who felt sure in their heart of hearts that God would 'credit' them with their willingness

*"The capacity of the strenuous mood lies so deep among our natural human possibilities that even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in God, men would postulate one as a pretext for living hard and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest."—William James, "The Will to Believe," p. 213.

and set more store by them thus than if in his unfathomable scheme he had not damned them at all.”*

In the last analysis, then, at least as empirically viewed, it does seem that men would not affirm life to be good, if pain should be forever a real evil and not merely an incident in social and moral evolution, or a blessing in disguise; if suffering and defeat, despite virtue and loyalty to the cause of righteousness should be forever the inevitable concomitant of high moral endeavor. In the last analysis, that is, optimism must seemingly be construed in terms of happiness. Yet in reality there is in this a purely psychological interpretation of optimism, and, philosophically viewed, a complete burking of the ethical (idealistic) problem of optimism.

Before, however, passing to criticism and reconstruction, we must see clearly that the monists precisely in the same degree, if not wholly in the same way, as the pluralists, make the optimistic implications of idealism hedonistic. In the view of the pluralists, the divorce between virtue and happiness is “unnatural”—a phase of social and moral evolution; and when man shall have been made perfect through suffering and virtue have become “natural,”—effort having passed into full and free activity and duty into love,—then shall we know the supremest happiness. “I think we must . . . admit,” says Prof. James Seth in concluding the sanest and most sympathetic statement and criticism of Hedonism yet written, “that while the mere distinctions of feeling, as pleasant or painful, are not, as such, moral distinctions, and do not always coincide with the latter, yet these distinctions are naturally connected and coincident. If pleasure is not itself the good, it is its natural and normal index and expression, as pain is the natural and normal index and expression of evil. . . . The Christian world has drawn its inspiration from a Life that has seemed to it the fulfillment of the Platonic and Prophetic dream—a life of transcendent goodness, which was also a life of utmost suffering We must indeed believe that the goal of moral progress is [contains] the complete coincidence of goodness with happiness. But at present it is not so, and the lesson of

*“The Principles of Psychology,” 1st Ed., p. 316.

the best lives is that the way to that goal lies through suffering."*

In the view of the monists, on the other hand, though pain and defeat shall never cease, the brave who have fought and triumphed in their finite degree, shall experience in the midst of pain and defeat a deeper joy—the very joy and peace of God. "It is the fate of life," says Professor Royce, "to be restless, capricious, and therefore tragic. . . . One thing only that is greater than this fate endures in us, if we are wise of heart; and this one thing endures forever in the heart of the great World-Spirit of whose wisdom ours is but a fragmentary reflection. This one thing . . . is the eternal resolution that if the world *will* be tragic, it *shall* still, in Satan's despite, be spiritual. And this resolution is . . . the very essence of the Spirit's own eternal joy."† And again: "We have found [by the method of absolute idealism] in a world of doubt but one assurance—but one, and yet how rich! All else is hypothesis. The Logos alone is sure. The brief and seemingly so abstract creed of philosophy: '*This world is the world of the Logos*', has answered our questions in the one sense in which we can dare to hope for an answer. The rest is silence—and, here on the earth, endless labor in the might of the Spirit, for whom and in whom is all sorrow and bitterness, and all light and life—and peace."‡

With a kind of poetry, therefore, which appeals immensely to the most primordial sense in us—the sense of "our manhood's prime vigor"—rather than to the pure moral imagination, the absolute idealists, despite a doctrine that seems on the surface of it a philosophy of despair, win us into affirming the good of life. Yet they win us with a very hedonistic optimism. Goodness, triumphing goodness, means not only the perfecting of the life of God, which is the ethical ideal, but also thereby—and this, if Professor James is right, is the ultimate justification of human moral endeavor—a very divine happiness for finite individuals.

*"A Study of Ethical Principles," 5th Ed., p. 148.

† "The Spirit of Modern Philosophy," p. 264.

‡ "The Spirit of Modern Philosophy," p. 471.

II.

After showing that the monists, with even greater plausibility than the pluralists, construe optimism in terms of hedonism, we may pass to criticism and reconstruction. Since psychological optimism is indeed the inevitable outcome of the pluralist's presuppositions, but in nowise involved in those of the monist, we are here concerned with the objective proof of ethical optimism. And for this the absolute idealist has the necessary metaphysic.

What leads to the fallacious interpretation of optimism in terms of hedonism, on the part of the absolute idealist, is a wholly empirical and human confounding of the objective worth of the life of the Absolute with its subjective worth. Since, in our own experience, subjective worth invariably is the pleasurable content of consciousness, the subjective worth of the Absolute Experience receives from the idealists a like hedonistic evaluation. Now while indeed it is true that a worthy view of man means a worthy view of God, to proceed thus, empirically, from the nature of man to that of the Absolute is logically to conclude *only* that the unity and worth of the Absolute experience must be *at least* as spiritual and happy as man's. One can indeed accept life, if in the end man's life is to be as spiritually significant and happy as the deity's—and by hypothesis the deity's must be supremely happy. This is excellent enough in the view of the pluralist. But the absolute idealist must proceed deductively, must interpret the worth of human experience in terms of the Absolute Experience. The problem of optimism, then, from the monistic point of view, is not a question whether private human moral experience in and by itself is good. If that were the question, it would be altogether a matter of temperament how we should accept life—whether we should stand for self-realization in some lower or higher hedonistic sense, or for self-abnegation in some Stoic or Buddhist sense, or for vulgar suicide. But as it is, from the monistic—that is, from the strictly universal point of view—the problem of optimism is the question whether the Absolute Experience is affirmed by the deity him

self, despite pleasure or pain, or if it be so, in virtue of pain, to be good.

Seemingly, in thus putting the nature of the problem of optimism, we win our way through a truism; since, by hypothesis, the Absolute, *qua* the constitutive principle of all experience, necessarily affirms his life to be good. This, however, is to forget that the only objective "proof" of optimism that the idealist can offer, must be "analytical"; the predicate must appear to be contained in the subject. Now, by hypothesis, man, as the Hegelians say, is the "organ of the universal": man's true life must be identical with that of the Absolute. So that, if the Absolute sees to it, as he does, by actively constituting the moral world, by actively condemning and defeating evil, that his own life is good; then also, by implication, must man's *true* life be good. To say this, however, is to assert that the category of the finite moral life is neither "self-realization" in and through the Absolute, nor "self-abnegation"—resignation of a final and private happiness of the individual—for the Absolute: it is to say rather that the category of the moral life is "coöperation" with the Absolute, not in order that man's life (as if his life were merely his to be given or not given to God, as man in his caprice might indifferently determine) may be made "happy," but in order that reality may be a spiritual whole, and that the spiritual whole itself may be thus made perfect. And perfection in one's own kind is the only ultimate justification of being. But one's own finite *self* is real only in so far as it is *made* real: one's life is good only so far as it is *made* good: finite selfhood and life are made real and good only by man's active identification of himself with the mind and will of God. "We must indeed," says Professor James Seth, "think of our life and destiny, as like the course and destiny of the worlds, ultimately in God's hands, and not in our own. If man is an 'imperium' he is only an '*imperium in imperio*.' . . . All human experience

'Should teach us

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,

Rough-hew them how we will.'

Yet man cannot regard himself as a mere instrument in the

divine hand, a passive vehicle of the energy of God. Activity (*ἐνέργεια*) is the category of his life, and his highest conception of his relation to God is that of Coöperation (*συνεργία*). He must regard himself as a fellow-worker even with God. This is his high human birthright which he may not sell.”*

This is indeed excellent from the monistic point of view; but it cannot be, consistently, the judgment of the pluralist. For, from the pluralist's point of view, God and man are externally related to one another: and are, therefore, to use Aristotle's so common representation of the sculptor's task, at work *on* something foreign, which is obedient, no doubt, to the will of the worker, but still more or less intractable. The divine and the human task are not, in that case, really identical; man is not *inwardly* a co-worker with God. But if, as Aristotle said, the essential being of the Absolute is pure thought (*νοησις νοήσεως, θεωρία*), pure activity (*ἐνέργεια ἄνευ δυνάμεως*), then the form and the matter of the divine life are identical; the holy life is an absolute and inward “creation.” And if man's life has its constitutive principle in the Absolute, then, too, the form and the matter of human life must be identical, inwardly, with that of God's. If, therefore, men, without any mere mysticism in disparaging the contradictory “forms” of space and time, take the objective or organic point of view,—namely, that in nature, origin, and function they and the Absolute are one; and if in this spirit they actively affirm the life of God, then shall they, despite pleasure or pain, or rather in and through, as Professor James has it, complete social suicide, know their life to be good. But if they, in their blindness, oppose their wills to the will of the Absolute, whether by brute sinning or by striving after an “infinite expansion of (their future) self-consciousness,” then shall they know, in God's own season, that their life is bad. And deeper yet, they shall know their life as utterly bad, for they shall know the profoundest irony of evil fate—that in their deliberate blindness or sinning they became the very ministers of God's triumph.

Criticism rather than a constructive argument for ethical

**Loc. cit. Sup.* p. 397.

optimism is the object of this essay. But it is worth while in closing to submit a summary review of what should be the general "movement" of a constructive argument, on the monist's part, for ethical optimism:—Goodness, divine or human, exists only as an activity of the will—only as the active condemning and defeating of evil. In the world of the Absolute—the *one* spiritual world—evil shall never cease, because the activity of the Absolute, which is in its nature good, cannot cease. As the task of the Absolute will is infinite, so man's moral task—namely, the affirming of the mind and will of the Absolute—shall remain immortal. And, therefore, as man fulfills in greater degree his moral task, makes, as we say humanly, moral progress, he shall experience more and more of what men call unhappiness—eternal pain and defeat, and, it may be, even annihilation. Yet the world of the Absolute is not a world of evil, nor human life a life based in despair. For still nothing is good intrinsically except the good will: and he who forever wills the good, namely, the perfection of the Absolute life, thereby creates the reality of spirit, and secures, in a world where evil must be present, the supremacy of the good. This, then, is our optimism—that by active identification of our wills with the will of the Absolute *we save, in Satan's despite, the spirituality of the universe.*

To the strenuous moral agent idealism can offer no hedonistic consolations. The eternal world, it holds, contains Gethsemane. Its last word is: Courage! for the winning of universal spiritual life.

J. D. LOGAN.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA.